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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BUDAPEST 000430

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SUBJECT: ORBAN AND FIDESZ: READY TO GOVERN

REF: BUDAPEST 410

11. (SBU) Summary. FIDESZ is feeling good and is ready to govern - a confident and relaxed Viktor Orban told an international audience in Budapest on June 10, three days after scoring a major victory in the European Parliament elections. While acknowledging that the economy is the most important issue of the day, Orban declined to divulge specifics of his party's plans for addressing economic issues. FIDESZ is not interested in coalition governing - and Orban emphasized he will not cooperate with radical right forces. End summary.

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Looking Abroad  
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12. (SBU) The party's capture of 56 percent and 14 seats (reftel), Orban said was a "record" in Europe, and a "European victory," adding that assistance from Germany's Chancellor Merkel and Italian PM Berlusconi have been invaluable. (Comment: During election campaigns, Orban has regularly made a point of seeking out meetings, often amounting to little more than a photo-op, with foreign leaders presumed to be sympathetic towards FIDESZ. End Comment.)

13. (SBU) Several times during his speech, delivered at a breakfast event of the pro-FIDESZ Budapest Atlantic Forum, Orban commented that as an opposition leader, he is free to speak his mind, and does not have to worry about being politically correct. In this vein, he noted that the United States was unpopular during the Bush administration because of the President himself, and is unpopular now because it was the epicenter of the global financial crisis.

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Domestic Policies and Plans  
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14. (SBU) Looking ahead to general elections next year (or earlier, if FIDESZ has its way), "a simple majority in Parliament is all FIDESZ needs," Orban announced. Recalling his time as Prime Minister from 1998-2002, Orban pointed out that a coalition of three parties was "difficult" to manage - "never again." In the upcoming elections FIDESZ will secure a comfortable majority, and will cooperate with neither the "far right nor with the far left", according to Orban. The 56 percent of the votes obtained last week is enough proof, Orban added, that FIDESZ will not need to cooperate with anyone. (Comment. Interestingly, Orban was the only party leader during post-election broadcasts who did not comment on the extreme-right Jobbik party's strong showing in the EP elections, perhaps reflecting his effort to marginalize them prior to the upcoming national elections. End comment.)

15. (SBU) The party chairman elaborated on what he referred to as his "political creed": his most important values are family, church, and the nation. In domestic politics, Orban said he has spent the last fifteen years working to create a center-right party, with the goal of obtaining "at least 50 percent of the seats in Parliament." Today, however, a two-thirds majority is within closer reach than it was just two weeks ago. Continuing, Orban said that ultimately, Hungary appears to be moving toward a "one-party" system, and that one party will be FIDESZ, facing no real competition from smaller political entities.

16. (SBU) When asked to explain what specific actions FIDESZ would take to boost the economy, Orban said he is "a lawyer (albeit one who never practiced), not an economist." Offering a long response, but little insight into planned measures, he said the "state needs money" and "we will cut taxes." Reforms resulting in "simple and low" taxes will make doing business in Hungary attractive for enterprises. Bureaucracy and corruption must be addressed as well, he said, again without explaining specifics. FIDESZ will also initiate a new agreement with the IMF which, interestingly, Orban equated with "the Americans" throughout his remarks.

17. (U) On the issue of Roma integration, Orban announced that "the Roma have already voted for FIDESZ," the only party able to guarantee their security. FIDESZ is also the sole party which will provide "law, order, and employment."

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Comment

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18. (SBU) Speaking to a sympathetic crowd of approximately 120 people, Orban was clearly at ease and very comfortable with his party's current direction and recent performance. FIDESZ sources indicate that the party is indeed ready - and willing - to take over governing "at any moment." Interestingly, however, Orban regularly declines to provide much insight into specific measures his party would propose, and his message is often confined to a repetition of FIDESZ accomplishments during its time in office (1998-2002). Several FIDESZ interlocutors have told us that, by design, FIDESZ is holding their "reform" cards close to the chest, as they recognize they too will have some tough decisions to make to restructure the Hungarian political, economic, health care, and social support systems. Critical of the United States and certain EU leaders, Orban gave the impression of a leader who possesses enough political and social backing that he does not have to worry too much about niceties and paying lip service to the international community. The vote for the FIDESZ Party President at their June 13 national congress reflected the strength of Orban's support - he received 1211 of the 1216 votes cast.  
Levine